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Security Council

Seventy-third year

Provisional

8158th meeting

Wednesday, 17 January 2018, 9.30 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Umarov	(Kazakhstan)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Llorentty Soliz
	China	Mr. Lie Cheng
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Tanoh-Boutchoue
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Ndong Mba
	Ethiopia	Ms. Guadey
	France	Mrs. Gueguen
	Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
	Netherlands	Mr. Van Oosterom
	Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
	Poland	Ms. Wronecka
	Russian Federation	Mr. Safronkov
	Sweden	Mr. Lundkvist
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Allen
	United States of America	Mrs. Haley

Agenda

Security Council mission

Briefing by Security Council mission to Afghanistan (12 to 15 January 2018)

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The meeting was called to order at 9.35 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Security Council mission

Briefing by Security Council mission to Afghanistan (12 to 15 January 2018)

The President: The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

At this meeting, the Security Council will hear a briefing by the lead of the Security Council mission to Afghanistan from 12 to 15 January, namely, Kazakhstan.

I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of Kazakhstan.

To begin with, I would like to thank, on behalf of us all, the Government of Afghanistan, as well as the Special Representative of the the Secretary-General, Mr. Yamamoto, and the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), for their full support and assistance during the preparations for and actual visit to Afghanistan.

I also wish to thank all Security Council members who accompanied me on that very quick but very rich visit to Kabul. We managed to talk with more than 120 people during 15 meetings in the span of one and a half days. I thank them for keeping up with the fast pace.

During the visit to Kabul, the delegation met with the President, the Chief Executive of Afghanistan and other senior Afghan officials, including the National Security Advisor, the Chairman of the High Peace Council, and the Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Defence, Interior, Agriculture, Economy, Energy and Water, and Trade and Commerce, among others. We also met with members of Parliament, women's non-governmental organizations, civil society organizations, representatives of political parties and the electoral management bodies, as well as the leadership of UNAMA and NATO's Resolute Support Mission.

The lightning visit was an opportunity for Security Council members to gain a first-hand understanding of the country's needs and priorities, and to show solidarity with the people and the Government of Afghanistan. As Council members know, this was the first Security Council visit since 2010. It was important for the Security Council to reiterate its support for continued efforts to establish peace, stability and progress in Afghanistan. In essence, a number of challenges that were apparent during the Council's last visit persist, but new challenges and new opportunities have arisen in the meantime. Allow me to make a few main preliminary observations. A full report of the mission is being prepared and will be released with further details.

A first observation is that persisting insecurity continues to be the main obstacle to stabilization efforts. The security situation remains highly volatile. The mission noted with concern the increasing number of casualties as terrorist groups, including newcomers, are adopting increasingly violent tactics. One worrying trend is the presence and activity of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan Province (ISIL-KP) in the East and North of the country. Members of this group have intensified attacks on Shia populations and their places of worship, exposing the potential for deepening sectarian and ethnic tensions in the country.

To this are added the challenges posed by the return of foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) from Syria and Iraq who are regrouping in Afghanistan. There are concerns about the potential use of the territory of Afghanistan to destabilize countries of the region. In that regard, interlocutors from the Afghan Government stressed the need to increase regional cooperation in fighting and preventing terrorism and countering the movement of FTFs.

Our interlocutors aiso stressed the linkages between violent extremism, well-organized transnational terrorist groups and criminal networks related to drug production and trafficking and the exploitation of natural resources. When war is funded by the narcotics trade, insecurity has the potential to negatively impact stability in the region. But insecurity is also impacting domestic politics, which was identified as one of the greatest challenges to the conduct of elections. In turn, the main obstacle to peace, according to a number of interlocutors within the Government and Parliament, is the existence of safe havens and sanctuaries for the Taliban abroad. The Government reiterated its readiness to engage constructively with neighbouring countries to curb terrorism and negotiate.

Secondly, more tangible results are needed as the peace process seems to be making little progress. The visit came ahead of the Kabul process meeting scheduled for February, at which the Government is expected to present its strategy for reaching a settlement

with the armed opposition. There was unanimity that the conflict had to end and that it would take more than a purely military solution. Only comprehensive efforts would defeat the armed opposition. There is no military solution in Afghanistan in the absence of a political process.

The mission was briefed about the structure and work of the High Peace Council and its plans for 2017 to 2020. Building on the positive experience of the 2016 peace agreement with Hizb-i Islami, led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, the High Peace Council plans to in initiate talks with the Taliban. Yet, some interlocutors were not too optimistic, claiming that the Taliban had taken no significant steps towards establishing a peace process, despite the overtures of the Government. At the same time, working with the Taliban as a fragmented movement and not as a political party complicates prospects for constructive dialogue. Government officials and parliamentarians underlined the importance of an inclusive Afghan-led and owned peace process to long-term stability and prosperity.

The third observation is that the peace process is being pursued in tandem with efforts to advance inclusive and transparent governance, elections and reforms. Members of the Independent Election Commission and the Electoral Complaints Commission briefed the delegation on the preparations for the upcoming parliamentary and district council elections in 2018, including the development of an improved voter registry. They outlined measures to address the lack of trust in the electoral management bodies by convening regular meetings with political parties and civil society, and stressed their commitment to organizing transparent elections this year. The need for donor and Government support was noted, as was the challenging security environment.

Council members reiterated the need to hold elections this year that are transparent, timely, inclusive and impartial so as to ensure the credibility of the Government, rebuild the people's trust in their institutions, and prevent further destabilization. While plans for elections are ongoing, the National Unity Government also continues to prioritize its reform agenda, with an emphasis on anti-corruption measures, the rule of law and security sector reforms. At the same time, a number of political groups expressed growing concerns about factionalism within the Government, which has created political tensions. They noted the need to restore constructive dialogue between political forces.

Visiting Council members further heard about the enduring socioeconomic challenges that are undermining progress in governance. These include especially the lack of education among the population, the 400,000 young people who join an already stretched labour market every year, and the 39 per cent of the population that live below the poverty line. Government officials reiterated the need to intensify development efforts in order to help achieve the Sustainable Development Goals for the population.

The mission was further briefed on progress and challenges with regard to the human rights situation in the country. The Chair of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission focused in particular on the rights of children, protection issues and civilian casualties. The First Lady further discussed the empowerment of women with mission members.

Fourthly, international assistance remains essential to peace and reconciliation. The Kabul process foresees a transition to greater Afghan responsibility and ownership in both the security and the civilian areas, but that does not mean that Afghanistan does not need more support from the international community. In most of the meetings, Security Council members heard about the importance of continuing support to Afghanistan, be it by extending support to counterterrorism through cooperation on borders, data-sharing and capacity-building, or through development assistance to the reconstruction process, including to the region. Afghanistan, they heard, should lead these processes and play the central role in coordinating aid. In this regard, President Ghani reiterated his request for increased on-budget assistance and the implementation of the one United Nations process so as to ensure coherence among United Nations organizations. Others mentioned the need for donor support to be better coordinated in order to reach those in need.

The Government also reiterated its support for various regional processes that strengthen prospects for an Afghan-owned peace process. References were made to a variety of bilateral, trilateral or regional formats and strategies, such as the new United States strategy on South and Central Asia, which was widely welcomed, as were such forums as the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process. President Ghani stressed the importance of Security Council unity and consensus

on Afghanistan. Together with high-level Cabinet members, he expressed appreciation for the support of the Security Council, and especially of Kazakhstan, for keeping Afghanistan on the agenda.

Allow me to make a final observation. Peace and stability can be intensified through economic integration and connectivity with the region. While the Afghan Government emphasized the importance of development assistance in promoting Afghanistan's stability, discussions revealed a preference for a new paradigm based not just on aid but especially on increasing investment opportunities for trade, infrastructure, energy exchanges, market solutions and connectivity. President Ghani and ministers emphasized the investment possibilities of Afghanistan and how the interdependence of markets and transportation roads between countries could create incentives for peace and development in the region.

In this vision, economic development and greater regional cooperation are important factors in achieving security in Afghanistan. President Ghani emphasized his country's assets, such as geographic location, human capital and national resources, which can facilitate the integration of Afghanistan into regional processes. In turn, regional initiatives would contribute to long-term stability in Afghanistan. Cabinet members spoke about the potential of several projects, ranging from the One Belt One Road initiative to the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India pipeline and the Central Asia South Asia Electricity Transmission and Trade Project, as well as plans for a fibre-optics corridor to China. They also counted on the rapid development of railway corridors from Central Asian countries, China and Iran to South Asia through the territory of Afghanistan, as well as the development of the ports of Gwadar and Chabahar to provide the landlocked countries of Central Asia with access to warm waters.

Strong cooperation among neighbours is critical to promoting stability and prosperity in and around Afghanistan. This is the model of economic integration and stabilization that any subregion can use for the prevention of conflicts and the restoration of peace.

At this point, I would like to take this opportunity to mention that this message is precisely the subject of a ministerial debate that the delegation of Kazakhstan has scheduled for Friday, 19 January, to be chaired by the Foreign Minister.

I resume my functions as President of the Council.

On behalf of the Council, I should like to express appreciation to all the members of the Security Council and the Secretariat who participated in the mission for the manner in which they discharged their important responsibilities.

The meeting rose at 9.50 a.m.